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ABSTRACT

The greatest challange in education today is ensuring that all schools are as readily and fully accessible to handicapped children as to the nonhandicapped. From every standpoint, whether that of human rights, economic efficiency, educational effectiveness, or social desirability, the national interest is to serve handicapped children equally with all others. Putting this concept into practice means turning away from the traditional segregation of the handicapped. Mainstreaming--progressively including and maintaining handicapped pupils in regular classes while providing top quality special education for them--has emerged as a key concept in the treatment of the handicapped. Under mainstreaming, the handicapped pupils are the responsibility of regular class teachers who are provided with the support and consultation of special educators. Mainstreaming has emerged for a number of reasons--the labeling of children has been rejected, technical and scientific progress has improved instructional apparatus, educators have become aware of the cost of transporting special education students to their own schools, and the courts have ordered changes in the treatment of the handicapped. (Author/IRT)

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MAINSTREAMING - A NEW PUBLIC POLICY IN EDUCATION

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"DESIGNING SCHOOLS AND SCHOOLING FOR THE HANDICAPPED"

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The greatest challenge in education today is to ensure that all schools are as readily and fully accessible to handicapped children as to the non-handicapped. Specifically, handicapped means crippled or other health impaired, blind and visually limited, deaf and hard of hearing, language and speech impaired, mentally retarded and other developmentally disabled, brain injured, severely emotionally disturbed, and those with learning disabilities connected with the above conditions or arising from other causes. Such handicaps, singly or in combination, make up the fifteen percent of school children who need individually designed and highly specialized education.

From every standpoint, whether human rights, economic efficiency, educational effectiveness, or social desirability, it is in the national interest to resolve this problem. Handicapped children can and should be served equally with all others.

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Historically, education for handicapped children has followed a separate road, sometimes parallel but always apart from regular education. Even when housed in or near regular schools, the handicapped pupils usually have been isolated in their own rooms or suites.

For years, handicapped children have stood last in line for desirable educational space. Too often their classrooms have been in outworn obsolescent buildings, minimally modified basements and even renovated garages.

The main reasons for this inadequacy are two fold: either no planning or poor planning by inexperienced persons has characterized educational space developed for exceptional children. Well-intentioned but inappropriate educational and architectural adjustments have too often failed to meet the educational needs of the exceptional children for whom the adjustments were intended.

Educational progress is long overdue. What we have had in fact, is a 170 year old model with a fitful history. In 1806 the English Lancastrian system of batch-process education was introduced into America. The first fully graded public school was introduced in Boston in 1848 with the Quincy Grammar School, a school still in use. A batch of students fastened to a teacher in a box established itself as the norm for the next hundred years and the configuration of school buildings became set in a rigid mold that is now as familiar and as American as Thanksgiving turkey.

The whole teaching-learning continuum, which was once tied

in an orderly way to the passing of generations and the growth of a child into a man or woman - this whole process has exploded in our faces.

Schools of the past tried to funnel a body of knowledge through the teacher, the eternal talking machine. The pattern was fixed. Treat all children alike. Today's demand for high quality education means reckoning with differences. It points to the diverse and individual ways children learn and teachers teach. It holds that people learn best through discovery and exploration, not by being lectured to. It views communication with other children, as well as adults, as a prime ingredient of growth. And it sees learning as a mosaic pattern made up of many fragments of information from numberless sources rather than as an unbroken linear development.

Putting these concepts into practice must mean a significant turnaround in the way we have traditionally designed our schools and our schooling.

Clearly, education today requires a high degree of movement, interaction and communication. Classroom boxes were never intended for such. The thrust is toward buildings that will get out of the way and permit teachers to practice the best that is known. Open space, for instance, is the first major change in the design of school houses for more than a hundred years. Close behind is "mainstreaming" that places the handicapped child in this open environment together with his peers.

The ultimate goal of programs for handicapped persons is

not sterotyping but normalization. Each human lives an unique life, and each life is lived within society's boundaries. There is a broad area within socially acceptable bounds that is normal. The process called normalization is one which hopefully makes it feasible for a handicapped person to learn to participate effectively within those bounds, to be a normal individual. It is accomplished by becoming self sufficient, self reliant, self respecting: literally by building a self which can coexist with all others with independence equivalent to that shown by others. The school points the way and mainstreaming can help make this giant forward step from simplistic sloganeering to reality. The over-arching goal is effective independent living.

First the handicapped were assembled in separate schools. Before 1940, special education tended to be decidedly isolated from regular education. America and other nations are dotted with special day schools and special residential schools, mostly built between 1880 and the 1930's. Today, with mainstreaming the direction is diametrically reversed. We are now bringing more and more of the handicapped out of their socially confining isolated classes and into the centralized life of community schools, as a part of the normal student body. The automobile age has triggered improved ways to deliver children to more comprehensive and more modern schools. As a result they enjoy real improvement in their educational opportunities under more natural circumstances.

The move away from special schools accelerated in the early 1970's because of social action pressures. As a result mainstreaming has emerged as a key concept. Mainstreaming means progressively including and maintaining handicapped pupils in regular classes while providing top quality special education for them. Under mainstreaming the handicapped pupils are the responsibility of regular class teachers with support and consultation from special educators. This approach generally meets the needs of 70 to 80 percent of exceptional children. It also brings into regular classes special education teaching procedures which can benefit all children.

Unfortunately, for many years both regular and special education contributed to the improper application of the aptitude formula which considered that learning capacity was unchangeable. Special and regular education were long dominated by the formula:

1. Find a measure of pupil aptitude (intelligence).
2. Teach in terms of the measured aptitude (intelligence).

Mainstreaming comes at the same time that special education is responding to a different formula, one which can also have profound positive effects on teaching all children. The formula is:

1. a. Find the pupil's low spots in achievement (deficits).
   b. Teach intensively to correct them (remedy).
2. a. Find the pupil's high spots in achievement (assets).
   b. Teach extensively to enhance them (extend).
3. Do both (1) and (2) concurrently.

Mainstreaming as a new educational public policy emerged from a complex of motives. They are raveled through the life of the nation but some of the main strands can be identified.

First is the rejection of labeling children. It is widely believed that if a child is called slow, retarded, handicapped or disturbed, the label will stick and influence the way the child is treated by the people around him. It will also influence, in a negative fashion, the way the child perceives himself.

A second strand of motivation grows from the recent technical and scientific progress of instructional apparatus. It is becoming more compact and more mobile. Instructional materials are standardized and mass produced. At the same time special teaching methods that formerly depended on the clinical artistry of the gifted teacher have now been systematized, packaged and distributed. This has widened the area of application to both the regular pupil and the exceptional, permitting them to move together, side by side.

The third source of pressure for change rises out of court action which has ordered change.

The United States Constitution does not mention education. The Tenth Amendment, part of the Bill of Rights added to the Constitution in 1791 placed education under the responsibility and the authority of the several states.

In 1974 litigation was underway in at least twenty states, where parents were bringing suit for denial to their handicapped children of "equal protection" under the Fourteenth Amendment. Many of their handicapped children, they claimed, were excluded

from schools on the ground that there was no provision for them. As a result, handicapped children have been held by the legislature and courts of some states and the Federal structure to be entitled to be equal participants in and equal beneficiaries of the above educational goals. We observe an increasing effort, nationally, to make that happen. It is yet far from a fully effective effort but it is growing.

An early example is the Pennsylvania Consent Agreement which affirmed the right to full and free education for handicapped children. Specifically, the court made the finding that the most desirable setting for special education is in the regular classroom.

Ten states have issued executive decrees to mandate a general thrust toward mainstreaming and many other states are driving toward the same objective. There is general agreement today that we are not meeting the educational needs of one half of the seven million handicapped children and youth in the nation. Mainstreaming is not the only solution but is a remedial step in the right direction.

Finally there is the factor of rising costs. While we know of little hard data at present on comparative costs, recent studies have found the expense of transportation contributing in a major way to the high per pupil cost of special education. What information there is, however, suggests that mainstreaming is no more expensive, and in at least one instance has been reported to be less costly per pupil. Thus mainstreaming may prove to be a

style of educational management which produces better schooling for more children along with more efficient utilization of the community's school buildings and personnel.

As might be expected some parents and teachers have been reluctant to accept mainstreaming. Parents who have found regular schools inhospitable have not been willing to move from special schools where exceptional youngsters have been comfortable and well treated. Some regular teachers have been dubious about their own capabilities.

It was soon made clear however that mainstreaming is not for all pupils. Some handicapped children need separation and this will continue to be provided. Separate special education schools as norms will be supplied only to those exceptional children who present learning and instructional problems so extreme and complex as to make optimum education, mostly in regular classrooms, impossible, even with special help. This will be a small but important proportion, one which necessitates even more flexibly designed special schools and classes than we now have.

Despite occassional demurrers however, the advocates of mainstreaming are drawing most parents and teachers with them. Large numbers of parents, pupils and teachers are becoming more and more ready for mainstreaming each year. The instructional know-how and the equipment and materials are at hand and are increasingly portable. There is widening public understanding and agreement with the policy. The one component least prepared to deal with the new policy is America's school buildings.

The great challenge now is to modify the Nation's school buildings to accommodate the handicapped. When that change is made there will be a significant spin-off. School systems may then employ handicapped professional teachers now often denied opportunities because of architectural barriers. Handicapped parents may visit their children's schools. Groups of handicapped persons may enjoy evening activities at community schools. The needed change can have positive effects on the lives of many more than the pupils who constitute the target group.

Mainstreaming does not mean dumping handicapped pupils, with all of their problems, into an unprepared and sometimes openly hostile school system. Thoughtful preparation must ready the parents, the pupils and, above all, the team of regular and special education teachers. Efficient and effective mainstreaming calls for marked changes in teacher activity, not to mention the essential adjustments in buildings.

School superintendents and planning directors, feeling the tide of mainstreaming, are faced with realistic and pressing questions. What would shifting special education into the mainstream involve? How much and what portions of special education take that route? When and where should we start? Would added expense be entailed in initial steps; or in the long range? Are staff and faculty members supportive and ready to move? Do the school buildings and ancillary services lend themselves to including the handicapped? Are the families and the community ready to be partners with the school in such a change?

These and other tough issues immediately confront school officials, board members and other community leaders. The degree to which hard data can be assembled and shared with key decision makers can be of utmost importance.

Specifically, it is necessary to determine the following very early in any planning sequence leading to mainstreaming:

(a) Is the leadership staff well informed about mainstreaming and does it have the tools with which to pass on the knowledge to teachers and parents? If not, how can the matter be remedied?

(b) What will it take to make present buildings and related facilities compatible with mainstreaming and how can the compatibility of future buildings and facilities be assured?

Some school systems have much of the information they need for decisions about mainstreaming. They may need only to organize the data, fill in the gaps, and then develop plans and projections for the decision makers. Others, lacking all but the most basic data, may be required to do the initial background gathering. In either event, administrators and planners must realistically focus on the horizon where the challenge of mainstreaming is moving closer every day.